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## Broken constitutional promises

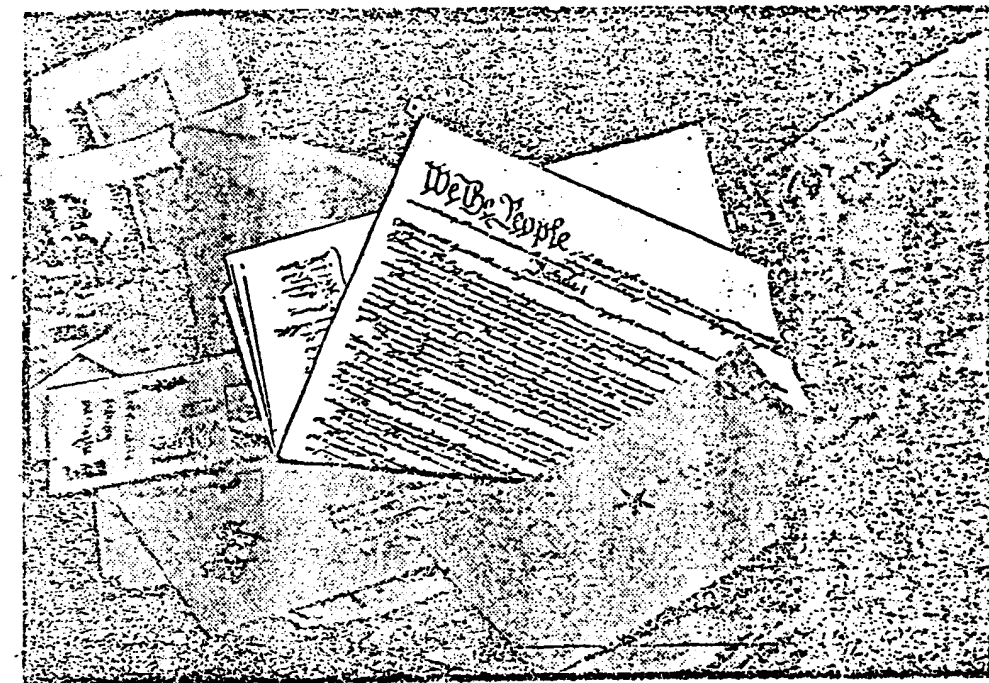
In a sense, the United States is putting its money where its Constitution is.

A federal district court judge in Brooklyn has ordered the Federal Government to pay \$1,000 plus court costs to each of three plaintiffs whose mail was opened during the Central Intelligence Agency's domestic mail-surveillance program. The judge has also ordered the Government to write an apology to the three people.

This is the first decision in a number of cases which have resulted from the CIA mail-surveillance project that lasted off and on from 1953 to 1973. During that time an estimated 215,000 pieces of mail directed to or from U.S. citizens were opened.

At first the idea of the U.S. Government paying reparations to U.S. citizens is startling. But payment of monetary damages—especially in the fairly limited amounts designated by the Brooklyn judge—is an appropriate way for Washington to show it is serious about doing away with abusive practices of the past.

In case anyone has lingering doubts about whether the practices actually were abusive, here's a rundown of the "offenses" committed by the plaintiffs who have now won damages: An Amherst College sociology professor wrote to a professor in the Soviet Union about an upcoming meeting on the sociology of religion; a placement coordinator at a Boston college wrote to a Soviet dissident; a Minneapolis advertising execu-



tive corresponded with his son, an exchange student at Moscow State University.

Horrendous offenses worthy of CIA attention? Hardly.

Perhaps our government can best demonstrate its intention to eliminate totally this kind of abuse of power by enacting tough wire-tapping and mail-surveillance legislation.

A wire-tap bill that would require a judicial warrant for any electronic surveillance in national security cases is now before Congress, though passage this year seems unlikely. A bill to require a court order before any citizen's mail can be opened or logged in the interest of na-

tional security is also necessary.

The recent court decision awarding damages to victims of CIA zealotry is a signal that things will be done differently in Washington from now on. Stiff legislation is needed to translate that signal into entrenched reality.